A Help to Repentance

By the Rev.

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"Her sins, which are many, are forgiven:
for she loved much."—S. Luke vii: 47

REPENTANCE

SIN is the worst thing in the world because sin separates us from God. And sin in those who have been baptized and brought up Christians, is far worse than sin in unbaptized heathens, because it is sin against the Holy Spirit Who lives in the baptized, and it is like crucifying Jesus over again.

And yet, all who have grown up to be old enough to be masters of their own actions have fallen into sin. Some have fallen far deeper than others, but there is not one that has escaped entirely. Just think for one minute of all the sins that you have committed against God; many of them, perhaps, known only to yourself and Him. Have you no cause to fear His judgment? Is there then no remedy for this? Are sins committed after baptism never pardoned? Certainly they are, or else those who have been baptized would be in a terrible state indeed. For sins committed since baptism there must be, on our part, *Repentance*, and then God will give us *Forgiveness*. These pages are written to help you to arrive at true Repentance, so that you may have the blessing of entire forgiveness for the past.

The first step in repentance must be a real

longing to flee from sin and to live henceforth for God; there must be a sincere desire for conversion from a life of carelessness or ungodliness to a life of holiness. This desire and longing are the work of the Holy Spirit, and they will not be denied to those who call for them. Beware of thinking that you can repent entirely by your own power, or when you will; listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit, speaking to you through your conscience; remember, if you neglect to obey Him when He whispers to you "Return," His voice may be silenced never to speak to *you* again.

When once you have experienced this longing for repentance, and are determined to return to God, cost what it may, your next step will be to know what you have to repent of. This may appear a very easy matter but it is not so. We are told in Holy Scripture "That the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" And the same Scripture goes on to say, *"I, the Lord,* search the heart, *I* try the reins."—(Jer. xvii., 9, 10.) No doubt that you will remember some sins without any trouble, but you cannot understand the full guilt of them, and many other sins you will pass over altogether, unless you pray for the help of the Holy Spirit to discover them. This must be your next step, *self-*

examination; and to do this thoroughly you must pray God to teach you to know yourself. When you wish to undertake this work, go into some quiet place; if you have none at home, go into the church; provide yourself with pencil and paper, as you may find it useful to write down what the Holy Spirit reminds you of. Begin by kneeling down, and after thinking for a short time how good God has been to you, and how bad you have been to Him, say this prayer:

"O my God, Thou hast created me and hast redeemed me by the precious blood of Thy dear Son; Thou hast bestowed upon me many blessings in this life, and hast freely offered me the inheritance of the life to come. Yet I have sinned grievously against Thy goodness. O my God, I wish to return to Thee, yet I cannot take one step towards Thee without Thy help. Do Thou, by the inspiration of Thy Holy Spirit, open the eyes of my soul, that I may see my full sinfulness in Thy sight. Teach me to know myself the chief of sinners, that I may know Thee, the only God; through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen."

Then begin your self-examination; remaining kneeling, if you can; but if you find that you can collect your thoughts better in some other position by all means adopt it. It will

be best to begin with the sins that seem to weigh upon you most. Perhaps what grieves you most may be some particular *acts* of sin which you have committed once or twice during your past life, or it may be some *habit* of sin which you have fallen into and in which you still indulge. If the former in the case, call to mind what led you to commit these acts; what was your conduct after you had committed them; whether you have done anything to make amends for them; whether you have been kept from committing them more often by resisting the temptation, or only because there has been no temptation. If *acts* of any particular sin have been very common, so as to make it quite a *habit*, try and remember when the habit began; follow its growth up to the present time; see whether you ever struggled against it; whether you have been warned against it by your conscience or in any other way; whether you have carried it on deliberately, knowing it to be wrong; note any particular occasion on which the sin was worse than usual; think what has often led you into the sin and whether you have tried to avoid all that might do so. It will help you if you call to mind the different places you have lived in, or the different states of life through which you have passed; remember your home

when you were quite a little child, your school-days, your first leaving home for a place; remember those with whom you mixed, and those with whom you sinned, whether you encouraged them in it, or made them commit sins which they would not have done without you. Take first the sins into which you have most often fallen, and examine yourself about them after this manner. Think especially of the sins which you are in the habit of committing *now*, as well as those which you committed long ago; perhaps you will find this the most difficult task of all. When you have done all this, go through the Ten Commandments as they are explained by our Lord in His sermon on the Mount, and by the Church Catechism. If you feel no one sin more than another, begin with those at once. Do not try too much at one time; leave off your self-examination when you find your mind grow weary, and commence it again on another occasion by saying the prayer already given. The following is a list of sins against God's Commandments; you may read it through to help you to understand them better, and it will probably remind you of many sins of your past life which you have forgotten. It is not a complete list of every possible sin, but it will help you to see what kinds of sin the Commandments

forbid; as you read it through, ask yourself at the end of each Commandment whether you have committed any other sin like those mentioned. When your conscience accuses you of any sin, examine yourself about it after the method given above. Do not be in a hurry, and yet do not vex yourself if you cannot remember every little thing. The Holy Spirit will bring much to your remembrance that now you have forgotten; and God never expects impossibilities from us. Do your best; do not pass over any particular sin because it is too disagreeable; and God will make up all deficiencies.

SINS AGAINST THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

I. Choosing self-interest rather than God's laws when we cannot follow both. Acting on false motives; for instance, professing religion because we want to gain the good opinion of others, and *not* because we love God. Wishing to be rid of religion and thinking it troublesome. Sinning, thinking it easy to repent afterwards.

II. Sins against the worship of God; such as neglect of prayer. Not joining in public worship outwardly in actions, (such as kneeling, joining in the words &c.), or inwardly in our hearts and minds. Neglecting to read God's Holy Word. Wilfully neglecting to use the means of grace which

the Church affords. Attending places of worship which we know to belong not to the true Church. No praying for others, coming to Church to see people, instead of for worship.

III. Using holy names or words disrespectfully. Using bad language. Swearing, cursing, calling bad names. Behaving badly; whispering, laughing in Church. Joking on religious subjects. Despising religion in others. Arguing or talking about religion in an unbecoming spirit. Saying prayers carelessly. Coming to Confirmation or Holy Communion in a mere formal manner; making good resolutions and not trying to keep them.

IV. Not keeping Sunday holy; staying away from the Eucharist on that day; devoting it to common work or common amusements. Neglecting the Holy days and Fast days of the Church. Causing others to work unnecessarily on Sunday; spending money on Sunday without necessary cause. Neglecting work; wasting time; not making good use of the talents God has given us. Neglecting opportunities of doing good to others.

V. Disobedience to parents or any placed over us, unless their commands are contrary to God's law. Obeying them sullenly instead of cheerfully. Mocking, speaking disrespectfully of them, murmuring at them, threatening them, being impudent or rude to them; neglecting their advice, encouraging others to do the like. Ridiculing old age or infirmity. Playing truant from school; being idle at school or work; not doing lessons fairly, but copying from books or others. Setting a bad example to those younger than ourselves. Despising the laws of the land or the laws of the Church.

VI. Hating others; refusing to make friends

with them; quarreling; being passionate; speaking ill-naturedly to them; being glad to hear evil about them; being jealous of them; getting them punished undeservedly; despising them; acting unkindly; bearing thoughts of malice. Being cruel to animals. Murdering the souls of others by leading them into sin.

VII. Before you examine yourself on this Commandment, say this prayer: "Purify, O Lord, and cleanse my heart by the inspiration of Thy Holy Spirit." Do not dwell long on these sins, yet do not shrink from facing them. Listening to, or joining in, indecent conversation; indulging in unclean thoughts; reading what is impure in books or newspapers, or even in the Bible, with impure intention; looking at immodest pictures; singing indecent songs; writing indecent things, or drawing indecent pictures; going with bad companions, being immodest in manners; trying to attract notice, especially from the opposite sex; being guilty of unclean acts, alone or with others; encouraging others in such sins. Being vain of personal appearance; being overfond of dress. Greediness, drunkenness, daintiness, sloth, lying too late in bed, idle and foolish talking.

VIII. Taking money or anything else (even trifles) that is not our own. Not restoring what we have stolen, if it is in our power. Not returning what we have borrowed. Giving away what we have no right to give. Not trying to find the owner of lost property that we have found. Cheating shop-keepers or others by taking advantage of oversights; cheating railways and street-cars; not paying debts, running into debt when there is small chance of paying; obtaining money or credit

under false pretenses; injuring the property of others; extravagantly spending money; gambling; cheating those who employ us by idling during the time for which we are paid to work. Not giving alms. Being stingy. Cheating in games.

IX. Telling falsehoods; making false excuses; pretending illness; not acknowledging faults when rightly accused of them; inventing stories to our own honour; laying our own faults upon others; breaking promises; doing what is mean or underhand (such as reading other person's letters, listening to what is not intended for us to hear); deceiving others by our actions, if not by our words; trying to make our companions think us guilty of sins that we have never committed; boasting and exaggeration, speaking evil of others, taking pleasure in publishing their faults.

X. Being discontented with our lot, wanting what we cannot obtain without sin. Grumbling at clothes or food.

Note down on paper enough to remind you at some future time what the Holy Spirit has taught you about yourself. If you have gone through the above list of sins carefully and without shrinking from any, you have now before you a tolerably clear picture of your past life. And is it not a great deal worse than you expected before you began? See how you have offended the good God Who has done so much for you. See how you have set at nought the salvation which Christ died to win for you.

See how you have grieved the Holy Spirit Who was given you at your Baptism, and Who when you were determined upon sin, was longing for you to flee from temptation. What amends can you make for all this? What sorrow can you show sufficient to atone for your wickedness? What can cleanse you from so much guilt? The answer is plain. Only the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from sin. That blood must be applied to your soul, and again you will be clean. Your repentance must be deep, your heart must be broken and contrite and God, through Christ, will speak peace to your soul. You have discovered your sinfulness, you must mourn for it; you must try and feel more and more how wicked and ungrateful you have been; you must try and hate sin more and more; think how Christ is turning His face reproachingly,—yet lovingly, upon you, as He turned it upon Peter when he had sinned; like him you must go out and weep bitterly. To do this you must pray earnestly to God that He will give you deep and heart-felt contrition for the past.

When you desire to express your deep sorrow for your sins, you may use this prayer:

"My God, I repent with my whole heart for having offended Thee Who art infinitely good, loving, and gracious; therefore I will hence-

forth love and honour Thee above all things. Forgive, Almighty God, forgive, and have not my sins in remembrance. By the help of Thy grace I purpose never more to offend Thee; but confessing my sins, I will confide in Thy infinite mercy, and in the sacred merits of the bitter passion, and death of Thy dear Son, Jesus Christ, my Divine Redeemer, that Thou wilt graciously forgive me. Amen."

Then say also the fifty-first Psalm, applying each verse to yourself.

But this sorrow will be imperfect unless it leads you to the next step in repentance, which is *Confession*. God knows our sins just as He knows our wants. But as He bids us tell Him our wants in prayer, so He bids us tell Him our sins in confession. (1 John i. 9; Ps. xxxii, 5; Prov. xxviii, 13; Num. v. 6, 7; Lev. v, 1.) You must, therefore, pour out your sins before God, you must recount to Him what the Holy Spirit in your self-examination has convicted you of. You must not be content with saying, "I am a sinner," but you must say in what you have sinned; you must hide nothing, and you must excuse nothing.

But if your repentance is deep and earnest you will probably feel that this confession is not sufficient. You will long for some act of self-abasement and humiliation, by which you

may testify your willingness to bear the punishment for your sins; you will wish to receive a more direct assurance from God that they are put away; and, perhaps, you may wish for advice how to struggle against them for the future. All this you can obtain through the ministry of the Church. The Church is Christ's Body, and carries on Christ's work. You want to be reconciled to God? God has reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and has committed unto the ministers of the Church the ministry of reconciliation. (2 Cor. v, 18, 19.) The Priests of the Church have power to absolve you in the name of the Holy Trinity. (S. John xx., 23.) Just as Holy Baptism gives remission of sins committed previously, so Absolution gives remission of sins committed after Baptism. Seek, therefore, the application of Christ's Cleansing Blood to your soul in this His own appointed way. Go to one of His Priests and confess to him your sins, lay all before him as you have laid them before God. Do not shrink from the humiliation; accept it cheerfully as part of the punishment for the past. Remember that there will have to be confession before men and angels at the judgment-day. Remember that you go to the priest as a representative and ambassador of God, not simply as a friend. Do not be afraid that he would think badly of you

if you told him your sins; he had too many sins of his own to repent of to allow him to look too serevely upon yours, and what God has forgiven, it is not for him to remember. Neither need you fear that he will ever speak to others of what you tell him; he is bound by a law of the Church never to reveal anything told him in confession. No Priest who wishes to go to heaven himself would dare to give the slightest hint to any one of what he hears in confession. Many have suffered imprisonment, and even death, rather than break this solemn trust. You may find this confession painful and trying, but you will never regret having used it; those only who have experienced its blessings can tell you its full comforts. Before confession you may say this prayer: "O my God I dare not so much as lift up mine eyes unto heaven, so great is the number of my sins. I am unworthy of Thy pardon, and yet Thou dost not punish me as I deserve. Give me a contrite and humble heart that I may truly lament my sins. I thank Thee for not having cut me off in the midst of my wickedness, and for giving me this longing for repentance. I come now to confess my sins to Thee in the presence of Thy Priest. Give me grace to confess them with truth and penitence that I may receive Thy gift of absolution, and may here-

after serve Thee in newness of life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

Go into the church at the appointed time, and when the Priest is ready to hear you, kneel down; he will give you his blessing and bid you commence your confession. Bring the paper with you on which you have written down your sins. Remember to confess your *sins,* not your virtues; make no excuses for them; do not mention the names of other persons, confess *your* own sins, not *theirs.* Say how often (as nearly as you can) you have committed the different sins; do not be content with confessing generally what kind of sins you have committed, but state, as far as you can remember each act of sin: you need not mention the details of it, but if there are any circumstances that increase the guilt, state them. If you have any difficulty how to speak of any sin, tell the Priest so, and he will help you; do not be afraid of saying all that you have done; he has probably heard of much worse sins than yours are. Be sure to confess *all;* for if you volunteer to confess, it is a great sin to keep back anything. This is the form with which to commence your confession:

"In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen."

"I confess to God the Father Almighty, to

His only begotten Son Jesus Christ, and to God the Holy Ghost, before the whole company of Heaven, and to you, my father, that I have sinned exceedingly in thought, word and deed, by my fault, my own fault, my own most grievous fault: especially I confess that I have committed these sins."

Then tell him openly what the sins are that you have committed. When you have finished all that you have to confess, conclude with these words:

"For these and all my other sins which I cannot now remember, I am heartily sorry, I firmly purpose amendment; I most humbly ask pardon of God; and of you, my father, I beg for penance, advice and absolution; wherefore I pray God the Father Almighty, His only begotten Son Jesus Christ, and God the Holy Ghost, to have mercy upon me, and you, my father, to pray for me to the Lord our God."

The Priest will then give you advice about your sins, and will perhaps, have to ask you some questions to help you more fully to explain their nature. Listen attentively to what he says and resolve to act upon it. He will then show you how you must make *satisfaction* for your sins; this is also a necessary part of true repentance. We cannot, of course, make

any satisfaction to God for what we have done wrong. Christ's sacrifice alone is sufficient for that; but yet we have, by our self-denial and amendment of life, to join Him in making that satisfaction; just as, while He intercedes for us, we have to join Him in that intercession. But, in addition to this, many of our sins have injured our fellow-men as well as God, and to them, when possible, satisfaction must be made. What has been wrongfully obtained must be restored, insults must be apologized for, statements that have caused injury must be retracted, those whom we have led into sin must be won back, and wherever it is possible the evil which our sins have done must be undone; your repentance is not thorough unless you are willing to do this. The Priest will also, perhaps, tell you to say some prayer, or to perform some act of self-denial, to show your sorrow for sin and your readiness to bear the punishment it has deserved, and your submission to the authority of the Church. He will then pronounce over you the words of absolution, which convey to you the pardon and reconciliation to God which you have sought. Bow your head meekly to receive it; remember that he speaks it, not in his own name but in the name of God whose ambassador he is. You are clean now; those sins which troubled you so

before, and which made you dread to think of meeting God, are gone. Forget not, therefore, to return thanks for the great blessing that you have received. After absolution has been granted go and kneel down in the Church and say this form of thanksgiving:—

"O most merciful God, Who according to the multitude of Thy mercies, dost so put away the sins of those who truly repent that Thou rememberest them no more, accept this my confession for Thy mercy's sake. I thank Thee that Thou hast mercifully forgiven me all my sins. Give me grace to make a new beginning; keep me from falling back; strengthen me and uphold me to the end; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

Say also (if you have time) Psalm ciii.

Remember not to talk about what the Priest has said to you. Be *very careful* about this, for light and trivial talk often deprives spiritual blessings of half their benefit, and if you tell others what he has said to you, he may get the blame of its being known.

You are forgiven now. But remember that the hardest part of repentance yet remains, *amendment of life*. Think not, just because your old sins are gone, that therefore you are safe, that for the future you will find it quite easy to resist temptation. On the contrary, it

is probable that at first you will find it much harder than ever it has been before; the devil is not going to let you off easily, he will put out his powers against you all the more strongly because he sees that you are determined to resist him. The very strength of his temptations is a sign of God's favour; those whom the devil feels sure of he lets alone. You will want much prayer and watchfulness, and you must make frequent use of the means of grace; you may fall again, but even this must not discourage you, but only make you try all the more. You will, in all probability, have to use confession again. Some people find it useful to make a regular practice of confession, for the purpose of deepening repentance and of acting as a check upon sin. No doubt, the Priest to whom you make your first confession will give you advice about this. It is certainly good, if you fall again into any of your old sins, to seek for repentance and absolution as you have sought for them before. There are dangers in the constant use of confession, no doubt; it is very dangerous to think that you can sin wilfully and that forgiveness can be obtained by simply making a confession. Forgiveness is *not* obtained unless the repentance is sincere. But while you must beware of this danger, if you can seek confession again with true sor-

row and earnest purpose of amendment, you will find again that it will bring comfort to your soul.

The best rule about confession is that you should use it whenever your conscience is troubled with any weighty matter, or you need special help.

When you go to confession, you should go to the same Priest to whom you made your first confession, if possible; for he will understand you better than anyone else. If however, you cannot go to him, do not hesitate to go to some one else; but it is a bad thing to go about from one to another without real reason. The steps in preparing for your future confession must be the same as those you had to take in making your first Confession.

There must be—

I. Self-examination. If you are watchful and careful after your first confession you will get into the way of examining yourself every day, and especially before coming to Holy Communion. If you have done so, you will have no difficulty in examining yourself previous to confession. If you have become careless or lukewarm, you had better use again the list of sins given on page 8, beginning with the prayer on page 5.

Or you may take some simpler form, such as this:

What have I been since my last confession? Have I lived up to the promises I then made? Especially with regard to my besetting sins; have I given way to them again? Has it been only on one or two occasions or oftener? Or, have I abandoned myself to them altogether? How was it I first fell into them? Was it wilfully or thoughtlessly? Have I tried to repent of them as I ought? Am I sorry for them now?

Did I keep back anything which I ought to have confessed in my last confession?

Have I done any other wrong actions—laziness in rising, in work, or in prayer; neglected my religious duties; come without preparation to Holy Communion; been spiteful, disobedient, unkind, rude, quarrelsome, impatient, greedy, impure, dishonest, selfish, or led others into sin? Or, have I sinned in word by speaking untruths, boasting, using bad language, being angry, proud, uncharitable, immodest, idle, irreverent? Or in thought by vanity, selfishness, envy, wandering in prayer, revengeful feelings, unbelief, impurity, despair, discontent?

But self-examination is only a step in repentance. Next there must be—

II. Sorrow for sin. This can only be obtained by prayer for the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Try and think how terrible it is to have grieved Jesus again by your sins, after He has so mercifully forgiven you. The prayer printed on page 12 might be used again, but pour out your soul in your own words also. The penitential Psalms (which are Psalms vi., xxxii., xxxviii., li., cii., cxxx., cxliii.), are also good prayers to express penitence.

The form of confession will be found on page 16; you should add that the sins you now confess had been committed since your last confession, stating how long a time has passed since the last time you confessed.

You will also find a form of thanksgiving on page 19. But do not be satisfied with this only. When you have finished your confession, go back into the church and thank God humbly and heartily, in your own words, for what He has done for you.

May you who read this little book find true peace and cleansing for your poor wounded soul through the precious Blood of Christ.

Why Confession?

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by

The Rev. Karl Tiedemann, O.H.C.

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